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ABSTRACT

Pre-referral guidelines developed by the Minnesota State Department of Education are presented. The guidelines concern the possible referral of students with unique learning patterns and are organized around existing district policies, teacher-student relationships, teacher skills, and alternative instructional programs provided by the various school districts. Such topics as collegiality and cooperation, parent involvement, interagency cooperation, identification of students with special needs, accommodation of individual needs, alternative programs, and available resources are covered. A 25-item bibliography is included. Appended are a model of pre-referral and an implementation checklist. (CB)

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MINNESOTA EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

PRE-REFERRAL GUIDELINES

April 1987

Minnesota Department of Education

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PRE-REFERRAL GUIDELINES

April 1987

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INTRODUCTION

Legislation passed by the 1985 session of the Minnesota State Legislature directed the State Department of Education to develop Pre-Referral Guidelines. The need for these guidelines arose from a series of recurring issues which include:

1. Administrative and peer support to classroom teachers in problem solving and implementation of intervention strategies.

   Collegial support and positive school climate are two characteristics addressed in the Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program. Chalfant and Pysch (1985) state that without administrative and staff support it is doubtful whether a team support model would be effective.

2. Students with unmet needs.

   Studies have indicated that approximately 25% of school age students have academic or behaviorial difficulty. Of that number, 10-12% may qualify for special education services (Chalfant, 1984). The remaining 12½% are students whose needs are not being met.

3. Parent involvement in the educational programs for their children.

   Involving parents in the educational program of their child is generally thought to produce positive benefits. These benefits have been described in terms of improved child outcomes, increased parent skill, improved parent emotional well-being, and improved operation of the educational program itself (Cone, Delawyer, Wolfe, 1985). Public Law 94-142 has parent participation as one of its principles. While parent participation is certainly desirous, it is complex and teachers need strategies to promote such participation.

4. Needs of classroom teachers in learning strategies to deal with at-risk students and those mildly handicapped students who are mainstreamed.

   Research suggests that only a small percentage of regular education personnel feel they possess the necessary skills to teach students with problems (Salend, 1984). Training to promote positive attitudes is also needed. Redden and Blackhurst (1978) identified 6 functions and 32 competency statements relating to the skills necessary for successful mainstream experiences. The Teacher Assistance Team (TAT) model was designed to address needs identified by regular education teachers (Chalfant and Pysh, 1978).

5. The increase in the number of referrals and students served by Special Education, especially in the Learning Disaabilities and the Emotional/Behaviorally Disturbed categories.

   In Minnesota, as elsewhere, there has been a significant increase in referrals to special education of school age students with learning and behavior problems. Since 1979 there has been an increase of 4,621 Specific Learning Disabled (SLD) and Emotionally/Behaviorally Disturbed (E/BD) students, of which 3,556 of these have been categorized as E/BD and 1,007 as SLD (Minnesota Child Count Data, 1979-1984).

6. Efficient use of resources through collaboration among the various school programs such as Chapter I, Assurance of Mastery, Educational Effectiveness, Limited English Proficiency, Guidance and Counseling, Regular Education, Vocational Education, Special Education and other remedial options.

The above issues do not comprise a comprehensive listing of concerns but they are believed to be the primary areas from which the need for pre-referral guidelines evolved.

The concept of pre-referral encompasses those curricular and instructional policies and procedures that should be carried out prior to referring a student to a program that in some manner modifies the curriculum or instruction. In its most basic form, a pre-referral guideline describes the policies and procedures of a sound general education program. Such a description (guideline) has been developed and training in its use is provided through the Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program. That program is based on current research and identifies the characteristics of an effective school. It is recommended that districts consider those characteristics and use those materials as it strives to improve its general education program.

These guidelines serve a much more limited purpose. It is important to note that they are not written as a "how to" manual. Instead their intent is to provide a basic framework from which schools can address the needs of all students utilizing a problem solving approach which does not rely on any one support services program exclusively. Their purpose is to clarify the policies and related activities essential to: a) identifying students experiencing difficulties learning in the general program and b) meeting the needs of those students within the framework of the general program. Both administrative and instructional policies and activities are addressed which focus on identifying a variety of alternatives to enable meeting the needs of all students within the regular classroom environment.

Concurrent with its directive that the Department develop pre-referral guidelines, the Legislature directed school districts to address student mastery of communications and mathematics skills. The Assurance of Mastery statute (M.S.123.742) directs districts to develop policies, standards, procedures, and remediation activities that

insure the availability of opportunities for every student to achieve in communications and mathematics skills. As this guideline was being developed, it became increasingly clear that the two activities were addressing the same issue from two different perspectives. The general issue is meeting the needs of students experiencing difficulty learning in the general classroom. The Assurance of Mastery statute was amended into the Planning, Evaluation, and Reporting (PER) legislation. It is presumed that the Assurance of Mastery mandate will be implemented through each district's PER process. It is recommended that implementation of pre-referral policies and activities be considered concurrently with implementation of the Assurance of Mastery directive to ensure consistency and coordination.

These pre-referral guidelines were developed based on the assumption that each district will adopt policies and implement procedures to meet the needs of students with unique learning patterns in a manner consistent with state and local policies. Specifically this guideline is organized around four principles:

1. District Boards and administrators have policies to support building level procedures which foster sound education for all students.

2. Teachers know their students as individuals.

3. Teachers have a broad repertoire of skills, strategies, and materials to meet the individual needs of a wide range of students.

4. District Boards and administrators provide alternative instructional programs for all students whose needs are beyond the reasonable responsibility of the classroom teacher.

PRINCIPLE I

District Boards and administrators have policies to support building level procedures which foster:

A. Collegial relationships and cooperative planning among buildings and district staff to provide alternatives for students.

B. Involvement and interaction with parents at the point of initial concern and ongoing during each student's full educational career.

C. Communication and cooperation with other child support/direct service agencies within the community.

A. COLLEGIALITY AND COOPERATION

A school climate of collegiality which allows teachers to assist and work together to solve problems of individual students in the classroom is critical. Procedures for staff sharing of knowledge and skills in at least the following should be implemented:

1. Successful promising practices developed by individual teachers.
2. Instructional models that accommodate a variety of student learning styles within the regular classroom.
3. Instructional techniques including teacher behaviors and their relationship to students' behavior.
4. Curriculum modifications to meet a variety of student needs.
5. Methods to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention strategies.

B. PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parent involvement in each student's education is essential to the successful implementation of intervention strategies and can be accomplished by:

1. Communications
   a. Telephone, written communications, conferences
   b. Relating positive information as well as concerns
2. Shared decision making
   a. At point of initial concern
   b. On a continuing basis

3. Development of written personalized learning plans for each student by a team consisting of the parent, student, and at least one professional.

C. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

A variety of human service agencies often have concurrent responsibilities for assisting citizens in different aspects of their lives. Agreements among those agencies as they variously impact a student's learning should be developed at the local level. The Board and administration of each district should assure that:

1. Specific action plans of all interacting agencies are developed.
2. A directory of community agencies and services and procedures for making contact and referral should be available to all staff.
3. Meetings with appropriate agency representatives should be regularly scheduled to address common interests and/or specific problems of students for whom the agencies have concurrent responsibilities.

A range of human service agencies exists in each community. They include at least:

1. County Health Services.
2. County Social Services.
3. Court Services and Probation Officers.
4. Vocational Rehabilitation Services.
5. Other public and private services unique to each community such as service clubs, ministerial associations, and community programs directed toward specific problems such as chemical abuse.

PRINCIPLE II

Teachers know their students as individuals. This knowledge should include:

A. Level of achievement.

B. Social acceptability among peers.

C. Self-perception

D. Mental and physical health

E. Cultural and linguistic background.

IDENTIFYING STUDENTS WHO ARE IN NEED

Students who are experiencing difficulty in school are a diverse group yet have many common characteristics. These characteristics may include, but are not limited to one or more of the following: slow rate of learning; low-average ability; limited English proficiency; high absenteeism, truancy and drop-out rates; low self-esteem; dysfuntional family relationships; greater tendency towards behavioral problems; lack of motivation; home environments that do not stress educational values; behavioral and/or socialization problems. Regular education teachers identify as one of their major concerns the number of students in classrooms experiencing failure who are not eligible for Special Education or Chapter One (Students With Unmet Needs Task Force, 1983). These students are often described as:

1. Low achievers.
2. Slow learners.
3. Disruptive.
4. Withdrawn.
5. Drop-outs.
6. Underachievers.
7. Limited English proficient.

The local policies and procedures developed in response to the Assurance of Mastery legislation should be utilized in the identification of students experiencing academic difficulty, and may be modified to address students exhibiting behavioral problems. Procedures for involving parents and other agencies in identifying students with special needs should be established in each district.

The following are procedures which should be a routine part of each teacher's repertoire of skills, techniques, and strategies for knowing each student. It must be recognized that teachers need ongoing support and training in their use and interpretation.

1. Review of cumulative file data

   This provides background information on academic, behavioral and social functioning, and health.

2. Subject-specific knowledge of each students progress toward stated learner outcomes

   This involves the use of criterion referenced tests, standardized tests, teacher tests, and curriculum-based assessment.

3. Behavior checklists and rating scales

   This provides teacher's, student's, and parent's perception of the existence or absence of specified behaviors and attitudes, frequency and severity, self-concept, and the individuals unique approach to learning.

4. Individual or team interviews

   Teachers, students, and parents provide background information and insight into antecedents and consequences of behavior.

5. Direct classroom observation

   Observations should be behavior specific and conducted by a trained neutral observer. Observations yield a data base for identifying the problem and provide direction for intervention.

6. Work samples

   These provide evidence of the amount and quality of a student's work.

In addition to the routine and ongoing assessment activities listed above, teachers should have access to a variety of support staff such as counselors, psychologists, social workers, nurses, and therapists. They can provide unique insights into student behaviors, capabilities, and motivations.

PRINCIPLE III

Teachers* have a broad repertoire of skills, strategies, and materials to meet the individual needs of a wide range of students within the classroom.

ACCOMMODATING INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

The teacher draws upon his/her knowledge, experience, and those of colleagues to identify and provide promising alternatives to meet students' individual needs. Some skills and strategies which may be employed are listed below but all require ongoing data, informal and formal, of the types described under Principle II.

1. Classroom environment

   Change of seating arrangements, special work areas, proximity to teacher often temper student behavior.

2. Adapt assignments

   Break assignments into appropriate segments, give options in format, extend/adjust due-time.

3. Modify materials

   Highlight important concepts, use vocabulary-study sheets, supplemental curriculum, perhaps a text with adjusted reading level.

4. Modify teaching methods

   Team teaching, regrouping, varying teaching methods to include modality of preference and different learning styles.

5. Confer with student

   The student may have ideas for planning learning activities which would be meaningful. They also may provide insight into preferred reinforcers.

6. Parents

   Provide information and support in planning strategies for interventions and reinforcement.

7. Rearrange student schedule

   Provide difficult classes in the morning, change of class section, or scheduled study time with supervision.

*The term **"teachers"** as used here has extended meaning to include all educators who have impact upon the instructional processes.

8. Other resources

   a. Fellow teachers

      Talking with last year's teachers may surface information and strategies which are useful.

   b. Counselors, principal, administrative and support personnel

      Informal conferencing alerts staff to your concern and generates support.

   c. Involved school staff such as office, cafeteria and maintenance personnel

      All school employees have the potential for positive influence on students.

When, in spite of general efforts to individualize instruction, particular students show limited progress, there may be a need for more formal avenues to address the needs of these students. Some examples of models for application within the regular school system are:

1. Peer tutoring program

   Tutor is matched with student.
   Teacher plans, provides materials and location.
   Schedule is arranged.
   Teacher/tutor monitor progress.

   NOTE: An extension of peer tutoring is Cooperative Learning (Johnson and Johnson, 1980).

2. Volunteer Teacher Advocate (Sprick, 1985)

   Match troubled student with teacher-volunteer.
   Volunteer assumes role of advocate and friend.
   A self-esteem strategy which can ultimately affect total program of student.

3. Learncycle (National Diffusion Network Project, 1982)

   Teacher requests assistance from two peers.
   System uses Problem Analysis Interview format.
   Team is convened to address needs of only the referred student.
   Team activities pinpoint the problem, observe and interview, implement, evaluate and recycle.
   This model requires only a short term committment.

4. Building-designed teacher support system

   System design is unique to the building and staff needs.
   Administrator/coordinator/consultant schedules a problem-solving meeting for designated student(s).
   Membership and participation are voluntary and varies dependent upon student being reviewed.

5. Teacher Assistance Team (Chalfant and Pysh, 1984)

   Building administrator trains with the team.
   Team members are three regular classroom teachers.
   The team meets regularly, is legitimate faculty activity, has access to school and community resources, and uses a six-step process:

   a. Teacher requests assistance (refers)
   b. Team defines problem(s) by diagram
   c. Brainstorming generates list of intervention options
   d. Teacher chooses options to try
   e. Together they plan strategies, materials, responsibilities and evaluation
   f. Review date is scheduled

   Team meetings last 30 minutes.

   The team may refer student to other services or programs.

6. Community/parent volunteer systems

   Parent volunteer tutors, Teacher helpers, Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP), and Foster Grandparent Programs are examples.

7. Student Support Groups

   Includes student assistance teams and friendship groups.

8. Parent specific activities

   Parent supervision of study time, carrying through on agreed upon behavior management techniques, and providing specific experiences are examples.

Special adaptations may not be successful or available, necessitating referral to alternative programs. It is important that all interventions be documented in order that everyone involved in further child-study and planning be well informed. A format for documenting the types of interventions and their effectiveness should include:

1. Documentation of progress toward desired change through:

   a. Test data
   b. Observation data

2. A baseline and pre-determined acceptable level of achievement or change through:

   a. District norms
   b. Classroom norms

3. Optional interventions if change is not sufficient.

4. A minimum of two documented interventions which include evaluation timelines are essential but the team and/or teacher have the option to provide as many different interventions as they deem appropriate.

PRINCIPLE IV

District Boards and administrators provide alternative instructional programs for all students whose needs are beyond the reasonable responsibility of the classroom teacher.

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

At this point in the process the teacher has identified a need and has documented attempts to meet that need within the classroom. The teacher has not and should not specify which of the various alternatives will meet the student's needs. Typically each of the alternatives is designed to meet the needs of a special population of students and has entrance criteria. Each district should have a standardized procedure for reviewing the cases of students whose needs are beyond the reasonable expectation of the regular classroom. Included in that procedure should be steps for referring the student to the program most likely to meet the student's needs. Such a judgement should not be demanded of a single teacher. Parents, community organizations, other support staff within the district, and building or district administrators should be included in the planning for alternative placements.

Some alternative programs which should be considered are:

1. Remedial classes
2. Chapter I program
3. Special education programs
4. Limited English proficient programs
5. Gifted programs
6. Vocational rehabilitation services
7. Alternative school settings
8. Human service agencies
9. Parent contracts
10. Community programs

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

A number of sources of specific information and assistance are available to a district. They include:

1. Other districts that have implemented activities under consideration. Space does not allow for specific citations of districts but locations and contact persons are available from the following sources:

   a. Elementary and Secondary Section
      Department of Education, (612) 296-4060

      - Listing of Education Effectiveness sites and contact persons
      - Names and phone numbers of subject matter specialists

   b. Curriculum and Technology Integration Section
      Department of Education, (612) 296-4067

      - Listing of Mastery Management sites and contact persons
      - Listing of Technology Demonstration sites and contact persons

   c. Outcome Based Education Office
      Department of Education, (612) 296-1451

      - Listing of districts and contact persons that have set local standards
      - Listing of districts and contact persons that have implemented general procedures

   d. PER Office
      Department of Education, (612) 296-9298

      - Listing and descriptions of district policies and procedures

   e. Assessment Office
      Department of Education, (612) 296-6002

      - Model Assurance of Mastery procedures

2. The Department of Education is beginning (January 1986) a project to provide training in Teacher Assistance Teams (TAT). TAT is a structured process to utilize the wide variety of skills available within its current staff to assist in the resolution of learning problems exhibited by some students. Initial training will be available spring-fall,1986. (612) 296-1429

3. The Department of Education annually selects schools to which it provides intensive staff-development in the implementation of Educational Effectiveness Programs. Districts may apply for that assistance, (612) 297-4680.

Each ECSU employs a regional educational effectiveness facilitator. Districts should contact their ECSU for assistance on effective programs.

4. The Council on Quality Education (CQE) office in the Department is concurrently beginning (Spring 1986) implementation of a dissemination activity that will, among a variety of entries, include descriptions of promising practices in effective programs, (612) 296-5072.

5. The Curriculum and Technology Integration Section in the Department has purchased, for district use, the rights to a generic microcomputer based program for the management of individualized education programs, (612) 296-4067.

6. The National Diffusion Network has descriptions and contact persons for a wide variety of education programs designed to meet a range of needs. Districts should contact their ECSU to receive this assistance.

This listing is not complete but provides a starting point for districts desiring specific information and assistance.

CLOSING STATEMENTS

The pre-referral guidelines specify four principles in the development of a general education program that meet the needs of all students. It lists alternative strategies available to school districts specific to the implementation of pre-referral activities. There are a number of more general issues, not addressed, that local and state policy makers and administrators must consider as improvements in education programs are planned. They include:

1. The initiation of any activity to change staff practices and procedures requires attention to a variety of issues including at least: a) existing staff perspectives as to the need to change and activities to clarify the need; b) existing staff skills and the need to develop new or improved skills; and c) overall committment to the desired results and the relative confidence that the proposed change will achieve the desired results.

2. The potential need to adjust priorities to employ additional staff possessing skills not available within existing staff may well impact the success of the proposal and careful planning for this eventuality is essential.

3. Experimentation with new uses of existing categorical resources may be necessary in an effort to improve education through modification of existing programs. Assurances that the philosophical base behind the categorical resource will have to be made, communicated, and kept while new approaches to achieve the same ends are explored. Such changes will require legislative or State Board of Education consideration and approval.

Lastly, the preceding guidelines are the Department's first attempt at outlining the procedures essential to pre-referral. It is assumed that, in eighteen to twenty-four months, the guidelines will need to be updated to account for new information gained through use. In the intervening years there will be a need for ongoing dialogue and discussion on the concepts inherent in these guidelines.

Minnesota Department of Education
December, 1985
Revised, 1987

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MODEL OF PRE-REFERRAL
A PROCESS FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATION

RATIONALE:
- The needs of approximately 12½% of school age children.
- The needs of classroom teachers in dealing with problem situations in the classroom.
- The needs of classroom teachers in promoting the involvement of parents in the educational program of their child.
- The need of administrative and peer support to classroom teachers in problem solving and the implementation of of intervention strategies.
- The need to decrease the number of referrals to special education.
- The need to make efficient use of resources through collaboration among various school programs.

DEFINITION:
The curricular and instructional policies and procedures that should be carried out prior to referring a student to a program that in some manner modifies the curriculum or instruction. (MDE)

PRINCIPLES:
- District Boards and administrators have policies to support building-level procedures which foster sound education for all students.
- Teachers know their students as individuals.
- Teachers have a broad repertoire of skills, strategies, and materials to meet the individual needs of a wide range of students.
- District Boards and administrators provide alternative instructional programs for all students whose needs are beyond the reasonable responsibility of the classroom teacher.

STRATEGIES:
Refer to Implementation check-list.

RESOURCES:
- Minnesota Department of Education (State)
    - Teacher Assistance Team training
    - Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program
    - Division of Instructional Effectiveness
        - Assessment & Program Evaluation
        - Curriculum Services
        - Instructional Design
        - Unique Learner Needs
- Educational Cooperative Service Units (Regional)
    - Intervention strategies (computer disks)
    - Network of Teacher Assistance Teams and contacts
    - Resource and support services from Educational Effectiveness facilitators
    - Inservices
- Districts (Local)
    - Central office support to building administrators and their teams
    - Provisions for networking of building teams and team contacts

DEFINITIONS:

1. Intervention - implementation of instructional modifications or programmatic alternatives to be used within and outside the regular classroom to prevent failure. (Chalfant & Pysh)

2. Staff Development - any activities designed to influence the knowledge skills and attitudes of educational personnel so that the quality of learning is improved. (MDE)

CLARIFICATION: Pre-referral is highly recommended as a sound educational practice, however, it is not mandated by the Minnesota Department of Education.

IMPLEMENTATION CHECK-LIST FOR PRE-REFERRAL

+ - (in place)
- - (not in place)
I - (Improvement needed)

	PHASE	RESPONSIBILITY	BEGINNING DATE	COMPLETED

	READINESS
	
	Establish position statement of a district's commitment to pre-referral
	• purpose
	• advocacy of building principal
	• three year commitment
	• inkind support
	  • meeting time
	  • release time
	  • facilities
	  • clerical support
	  • sub pay
	• continuous monitoring
	• interface with other programs
	• evaluation after three years
		School Board
		Administrators		

	PLANNING
	
	Establish Planning Committee
	Design Intervention Form
	Provide awareness for staff
	• rationale
	• pre-referral attitudes
	• long term goals
	• measureable outcomes
	• procedures/strategies for preventive interventions
	• potential strategies
	  • TAT model
	  • Cooperative Group learning models
	  • Peer tutoring program
	  • Volunteer Teacher Advocate
	  • Learncycle
	  • Building-designed teacher support system
	  • Community/parent volunteer systems
	  • Student support groups
	  • Parent specific activities
		District Planning Committee
		Administrators
		(outside consultants)		

IMPLEMENTATION CHECK-LIST FOR PRE-REFERRAL

+ - (in place)
- - (not in place)
I - (Improvement needed)

	PHASE	RESPONSIBILITY	BEGINNING DATE	COMPLETED
	PLANNING (continued)			
	Disseminate Pre-Referral plan • Administrators • Teachers (regular ed.) • Special educators (consultant model) • Parents • Support staff • Other non-certified staff	Administrators at district and building levels		
		Designee		
	ACTIVITIES			
	Establish a teacher support system • TAT • Educational Effectiveness • Local design	Administrators Staff		
	Train support team (on-going) • Problem-solving process • Team interaction skills • Communication skills • Team skills	Trained team Outside consultants		

IMPLEMENTATION CHECK-LIST FOR PRE-REFERRAL

+ - (in place)
- - (not in place)
I - (Improvement needed)

	PHASE	RESPONSIBILITY	BEGINNING DATE	COMPLETED
	IMPLEMENTATION OF PRE-REFERRAL PLAN			
	• Integrate with other programs • Promote to staff • Solicit staff commitment • Coaching • Feedback • Networking	Administrators Staff		
	Involve regular education teachers • Check student records • Talk to student's other teachers • Check with nurse and principal • Identify behavior • Talk to parents and child • Try two interventions in the classroom • Manage positive classroom environment • Adapt assignments • Modify teaching methods • Rearrange student schedule • Other resources	Administrators Regular education teachers		
	PROGRAM EVALUATION			
	Monitoring effectiveness • Open-ended written forms • Checklists • Structured questionnaires • Verbal feedback • Other	Administrators Support team Designee		
	Evaluate after three years • Students referred to TAT but not placed in other programs • Students referred through TAT to other programs • Teachers interviewed regarding classroom interventions • Parent survey			